

Highlights®

The  
**State**  
of the  
**Kid**™

**2016**

**Election Edition**





If you're a kid, the world can be confounding, and you naturally have questions and thoughts about what you see and hear.

If you're a grown-up committed to helping kids grow to become their best selves—creative, curious, caring, and confident—you want to know what kids are thinking, wondering, worrying about, and aspiring to achieve. At Highlights, we believe that listening to kids and seeking to understand their perspectives are key to serving and supporting them better.

That's why Highlights created its State of the Kid™ poll—an annual survey that gives kids ages six to twelve a national platform on which to share their thoughts on their experiences as kids today. Now in its eighth year, our survey has covered a variety of topics important to children and families. Year after year, the kids' responses have been unfailingly illuminating—sometimes funny and consistently thoughtful and honest.

This year, given that it's an election year and because of the election's unusual nature (an unconventional candidate and the historic possibility of the first woman president, for starters), we decided to focus on the election. We questioned kids on whether and how much they talk about the election at home, what they think the president should be focused on first in office, what they like about being Americans, and more. Their responses encouraged us, concerned us, amused us, and informed us.

We're pleased to share this year's survey results here and give you, too, a look at childhood through another lens—the lens we are offered when we lean in and listen to kids.

Sincerely,

*Christine French Cully*

**Christine French Cully**  
Editor in Chief, *Highlights*™ magazine

## Methodology

In addition to surveying *Highlights* readers on our website, (HighlightsKids.com), we engaged C+R Research, a leading market-research firm with expertise in youth and families, to ensure that our sampling would be representative of the broader U.S. population of children.

C+R analyzed the demographic data from the Highlights survey and then tapped into their kids' panel to provide us with a sample that would be balanced across genders and age groups. They also provided analysis of all data collected.

The survey was fielded April and May of 2016. A total of 2,000 surveys were completed by boys and girls ages six to twelve, of which 50% were boys and 50% were girls. Thirty-eight percent of respondents were ages six to eight; 31% were ages nine to ten, and 31% were ages eleven to twelve.

## Our Contributors

### Christine French Cully

Christine French Cully is the editor in chief of Highlights for Children, Inc., where she is responsible for shaping the editorial direction of all the products the company develops—its magazines, books, and digital products. She plays a strategic, ongoing role in the development of the Highlights vision and brand across all markets and channels around the globe.

Cully also leads the Highlights' mission to elevate the voice of children and encourage fellow parents and adults to commit to helping kids grow to become their best selves. She also helps ensure that every child's letter that comes through the Highlights door is read and responded to, penning many letters herself—because every child's voice matters.

In 2011, Cully was named an executive vice president of the Highlights Corporation. She is only the fourth editor in chief who has led the company during its 70-year history.



### Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, Ph.D.

Dr. Golinkoff is the Unidel H. Rodney Sharp Professor of Education, Professor of Linguistics and Cognitive Science, and Professor of Psychological and Brain Sciences at the University of Delaware. She has won numerous awards, including the American Psychological Association Award for Distinguished Service to Psychological Science and Distinguished Scientific Lecturer. Having written over 150 articles and 16 books, monographs, and special journal issues, Dr. Golinkoff, along with Dr. Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, is co-author of the new book *Becoming Brilliant: What Science Tells Us About Raising Successful Children*.



### Sasha L. Ribic, Psy.D.

Dr. Ribic is a licensed clinical psychologist in Columbus, Ohio. She provides psychotherapy for children, adolescents, and adults. She enjoys providing varied psychoeducational programs and parenting seminars within central Ohio.

Dr. Ribic utilizes an Adlerian psychological perspective to inform her work, which stresses the need for community and connection for maintaining mental health and wellness. Her work is collaborative and interactive with an emphasis on each individual's strengths and resiliencies. Dr. Ribic is a socially responsible practitioner, who respects and celebrates human diversity and difference.





# How much do you discuss the presidential election at home with your family?

## Families are abuzz with election chatter!

Our main goal at Highlights is to help parents raise kids who are creative, curious, caring, and confident, and we believe one way to do that is to encourage family communication, as it's vital in keeping families healthy and happy.

This year's presidential election provides a unique opportunity for family discussion, as many issues related to personal character—trustworthiness, honesty, and manners of candidates, to name a few—are at the forefront of election news coverage. Furthermore, key policies being discussed—immigration, keeping our country safe, healthcare, and jobs—all hit home with many families and kids,

and you can bet kids are paying attention and developing their own thoughts, concerns, and worries.

We polled kids to see if families are talking about the election, and were encouraged to learn that the majority of survey respondents—**80%—said yes, the election is a topic of discussion at home**, either often or at least a little bit. To no surprise, the percentage who said yes increased with age: **83% of 9- to 12-year-olds** report they discuss the election—**63%** discuss it a little, when there is something about it on television, and **20%** discuss it on most days.

80%

of kids talk about the presidential election at home.

62%

20%

18%

### ★ A LITTLE

When there is something about it on TV.

### ★ NOT AT ALL

My parents don't talk about it with me.

### ★ A LOT

We talk about it most days.



## Takeaway

**G**iven the negativity and volatility of the political arena this year, **talking to your kids about the election is more critical than ever.** Talking about the election can not only provide a springboard for educating children about our political system, the role of a president, and our role as citizens in elections; it provides a natural opportunity to help children develop a wide set of skills including critical thinking, creativity, empathy, and self-awareness.

Navigating the political waters and talking about the election can be hard enough as adults. Are you overwhelmed by how to talk to your kids about it? Dr. Ribic's reminder to parents:

**"You don't need all the answers!"**

She recommends asking your kids open-ended questions to help gauge their current awareness and understanding. This also helps them formulate their own opinions. "While you might think having to address negative, unkind comments might only feed the negative feeling surrounding the election, **you can turn the conversation into an opportunity to reinforce important morals like honesty, kindness, and treating everyone with respect,**" says Dr. Ribic.

It's also important to think about how you as an adult are talking about the election around children. According to Dr.

Golinkoff, parents need to be intentional about how—and how much—they expose children to election conversations. "Kids are hearing their parents say things about the candidates, and what is being said in the news, and they are picking up on it," says Dr. Golinkoff.

Talking about the election can also be a key opportunity to teach children critical thinking skills and the value of forming opinions. **"Conversations can be more powerful when opinions come from kids,"** says Dr. Golinkoff. "If you just tell your child something, it may go in one ear and out the other. But if you ask the child to make the judgment, the child is going to be forced to think more. And when children think more, the lesson lasts longer or a well-thought-out opinion is formed."

Finally, it's important to consider your child's age, prior knowledge, and maturity level before starting discussions or exposing them to news about the election. Dr. Golinkoff points out that conversations about issues related to ethnic groups or minorities may worry children, whether or not they themselves are part of the group being targeted. Therefore, Dr. Golinkoff notes it is best not to ignore these issues. Rather, parents should use them as an opportunity for inquiry and problem solving with their kids.





## Adults aren't the only ones worried— safety is top of mind for kids, too.

**I**t's clear that daily conversations about national security issues and terrorism are impacting our kids—**50%** of kids across all age groups answered **"keeping our country safe"** as the first action they want our new president to take. **"Saving the environment"** comes in at a distant second at **15%** (higher for girls at **18%** vs. boys at **13%**). **"Healthcare"** was next at **13%** followed by **"helping more people find jobs,"** which tied with **"helping kids do well in school"**—at **11%**.

We did see a slight difference in responses by age: Younger kids would like the president to focus on helping kids do well in school (**15%**) and are less concerned about the environment (**13%**) and job security (**8%**). Only **8%** of the older kids (9- to 10-year-olds and 11- to 12-year-olds) mentioned school; **11%** of 9- to 10-year-olds cited jobs, as did **15%** of 11- to 12-year-olds.

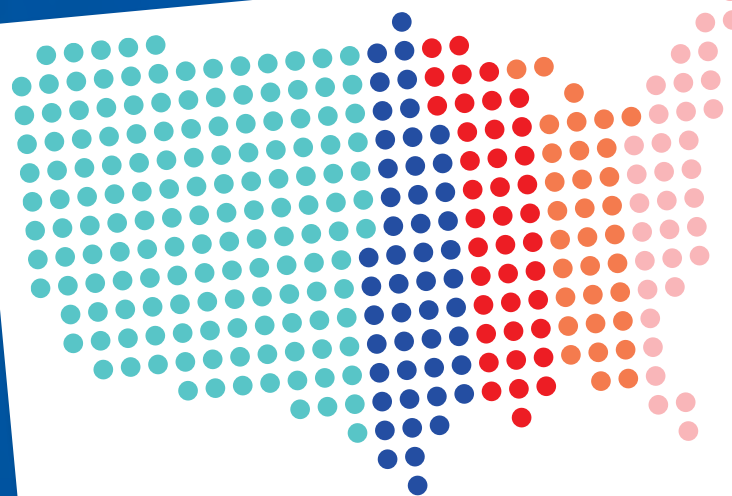
### Takeaway

**T**alking about safety concerns is never easy, but responding to a child intentionally and thoughtfully is critical because children are most certainly aware of safety issues. While no two kids will respond alike to a safety situation or a national disaster or attack, worried children have universal needs—to be heard, comforted, and offered a positive outlook.

**"By nature, kids are good observers, but bad interpreters,"** says Dr. Ribic. While kids will astutely observe safety is an issue—and many

bad things are happening—they aren't good at interpreting what it means for them, often causing their worry for their personal safety to spiral, according to Dr. Ribic. Parents should use conversations to put safety into perspective. Is it possible for tragic events to happen? Yes. But is it probable? No. Dr. Ribic suggests using this analogy with young children: If you filled up your whole living room with popcorn and one piece had a red dot on it, would you be able to find that one red dot? Yes, but it would be highly unlikely!

## What is the first thing our new president should work on when he or she takes office?



**50%**  
say keeping our country safe.

- 50%** Keeping our country safe
- 15%** Saving the environment
- 13%** Making sure all people can get healthcare
- 11%** Helping more people find jobs
- 11%** Helping kids do well in school

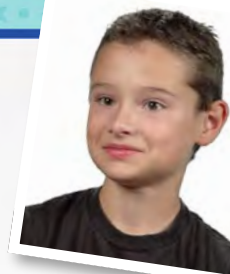
### Takeaway

Finally, Dr. Ribic advises parents to take advantage of moments when safety issues are addressed on TV to have the conversation. Start by asking questions to gauge your child's level of concern and emphasize he or she can always talk to a parent or trusted adult.

One piece of advice always rings true: listen first! **"Listening is the most important thing we can do when kids are feeling anxious,"** says Cully. "Allow kids time to express their feelings, and listen without assuming you know what will be said—it will help you to best decode and understand your child, as well as provide the best response. Does he or she just want to better understand what happened? Or is the child worried it might happen to him or her?"

**"Keeping our country safe and to make sure things stay in order."**

— Tanner, age 10

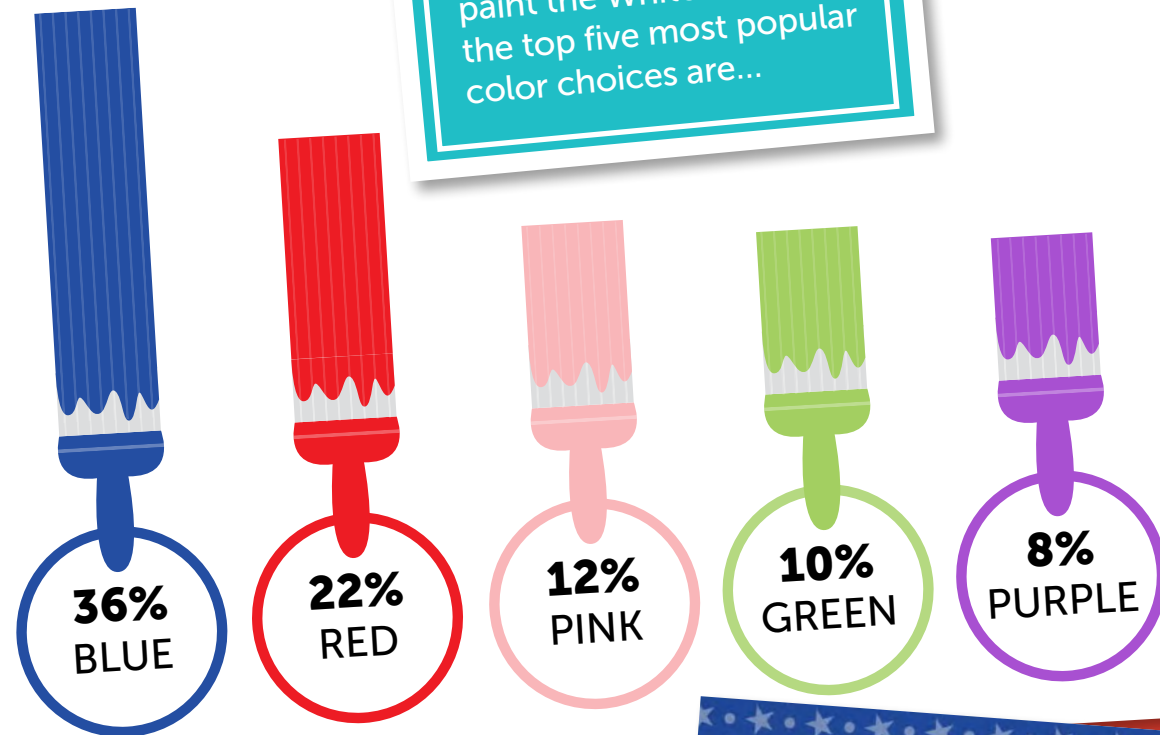




# If you could paint the White House, what color would you choose and why?

70%

of kids want to paint the White House a new color. Of those kids who would paint the White House, the top five most popular color choices are...



"Blue because it's one of the colors in the flag and it's also my favorite color."

—Vanessa, age 12



"Red because it is my favorite color and I think the White House needs a color update."

— Claudio, age 9



Get the paintbrushes out—most kids would change the color.

In the midst of our serious and thought-provoking questions for kids about the election, we thought it'd be fun to see what they think about the color of the White House. Looks like we have a nation of ambitious designers on our hands! While kids seem to understand the historical reverence and tradition of the White House being white, an overwhelming **70% of kids would change the color** of the White House if given the opportunity.

"I would leave it white because then you don't have to change the name."  
— Girl, age 8

"Every color of the rainbow because like a rainbow, our nation is made up of many colors!"  
— Girl, age 12

"Maybe just white because that's the color of the White House."

— Riley, age 8







## No line at the Oval Office: the majority of kids aren't interested in running.

**T**he majority of kids who answered our survey—**65%**—do not want to run for president, and that lack of interest only increases with age (**75%** of 11- to 12-year-olds don't want to be president). Many are deterred by the stress and difficulty associated with the job, as **41%** of kids said there'd be too much pressure being president. Kids also don't want to run because "we have other plans" (17%), followed by "it's too much responsibility" (10%).

Of the **35%** who say they would want to be president, many (28%) cite "wanting to make a difference" as the reason, followed by "it would be cool/fun" (10%) and they "want to be in charge/rule" at 9%.

**"No. I am going to be a shark scientist."**

— Boy, age 6

**"No because I want to be a professional soccer player and veterinarian."**

— Boy, age 7

### Takeaway

**W**hile some children do want to run for president to help people, to help make a difference in the world, we were surprised to learn that the majority of kids who responded to our survey think the job is too difficult, too much work. What does this say about the society we live in today?

Dr. Ribic explains, **"It's clear that stress is a major factor in why kids don't want to be president,** and it shouldn't come as a surprise—between the negative news coverage of both current presidential decisions

and the candidates, along with many negative comments from adults in their own lives, kids can easily pick up that being the president might not be the best job."

However, the majority response might have a silver lining. Dr. Ribic continues, **"Many kids simply want to be something else!** While being president may have been seen as the 'most successful' job at one time, kids are now being encouraged that they can be successful at anything they want to be."

## Would you want to run for president someday?

**35%**

Want to Run

**65%**

Don't Want to Run

"Yes, because I want to be able to lead our country into the right path."

— Kareem, age 12



"I wouldn't want to because I would be scared that I would do something wrong if I got elected and I probably wouldn't like all of the attention."

— Girl, age 9

### Takeaway

These survey results encourage parents to continue to enable their children to dream big. **"Parents should always praise effort over qualities like intelligence—**it's important for a child's development to reinforce hard work and the consistent desire to try—not just succeed," says Dr. Golinkoff. "This type of encouragement can develop kids who will believe they can grow up to be whatever they want to be."

**"It's up to adults to be champions for children and encourage them to grow up to be their best selves,** whether that's by being a president, teacher, astronaut, or chef," says Cully. "At the end of the day, any adult wants children to grow to be ambitious, self-sufficient, and ready to help and change the world."





## It seems honesty really is the best policy.

When we asked kids to select a quality they thought was most important in a president, they had an overwhelming top answer. Choosing from a list of options including honesty, smarts, kindness, lots of practice, and courage, honesty won hands down. Nearly half the kids surveyed (44%) resoundingly believe that **honesty is the most important quality** for a president to possess.

**"They should have honesty. They should always tell the truth."**

— Joel, age 11



### Takeaway

Given the focus on honesty—in both this election and previous elections, it's no surprise that always attentive children are picking up on the concerns of adults. "Kids are hearing their parents say things about candidates' trustworthiness," says Dr. Golinkoff, "so it follows that kids pick up on this and think honesty is most important."

"After hearing the candidates call one another liars throughout the campaign, kids may fear that we'll end up with a president who isn't honest," says Cully.

**"Parents can turn the campaign rhetoric into a teaching opportunity,**

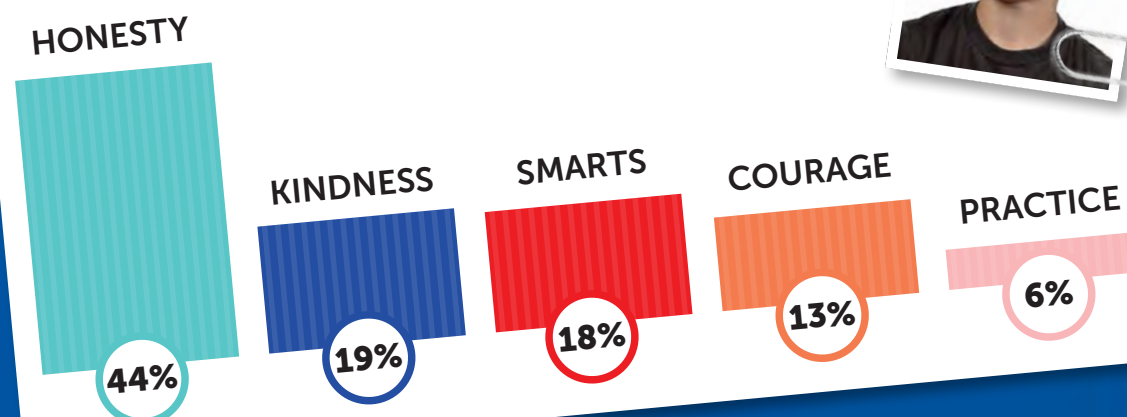
explaining candidly that politicians don't always play nicely together in their sandbox—and sometimes winning becomes more important to them

than truth telling. Take the moment to remind kids that the high road is the best road—and that their expectation that the president of the United States be honest is altogether reasonable."

While adult conversations are clearly having an impact on the opinions of children, Dr. Ribic points out children's emphasis and focus on honesty is also a product of their current development stage. "At this age [six to twelve], it's all focused on being a good girl or boy and telling the truth. A lot of daily conversations center on honesty and telling the truth. **It aligns with their moral development stage to value honesty at this age.**"

## What is the most important quality a president should have?

"Lots of honesty."  
— Tanner, age 10



**"Kindness because if they're not nice what else are they going to do."**

— Kate, age 8

**"Kindness because presidents are supposed to be really nice."**

— Jake, age 8





# What do you want the president to know about being a kid today?

School is important—and being a kid can be both fun and stressful!

When asked what the president should know about their lives, a large portion of our respondents—one in four kids (25%)—want him or her to know that **school is important** to them.

"Kids love to play and have fun at school learning."

— Girl, age 6

"It's fun to be a kid today and it gets better everyday."

— Boy, age 6

About two in ten kids (18%), higher for 6- to 8-year-olds at 25%, want the president to know that **being a kid is cool/fun**, but just as many (18%) say that it's **difficult/stressful** to be a kid today.

"Life is pretty good if the grownups don't mess it up!"

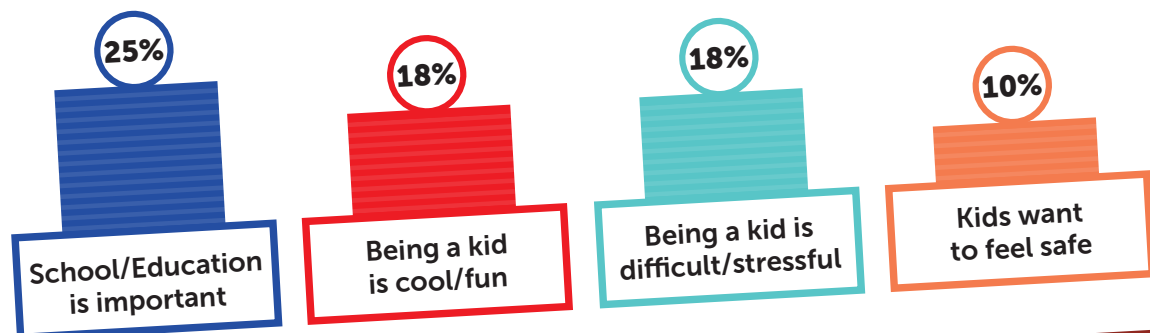
— Boy, age 7

"All kids need to be able to go to school."

— Girl, age 7

"It's not as easy as it used to be back then. We have a lot more things to deal with now."

— Boy, age 9



## What makes you proud to be an American/Live in the United States?

America the free: kids value their freedom.

At Highlights, we encourage children to think of themselves as citizens of a global world. At the same time, we think it's important that they respect their home country and appreciate the freedom it offers. In 2013, when we asked this question, our survey revealed that more kids believed that "freedom" was the best thing about living in the U.S. (39.8%).

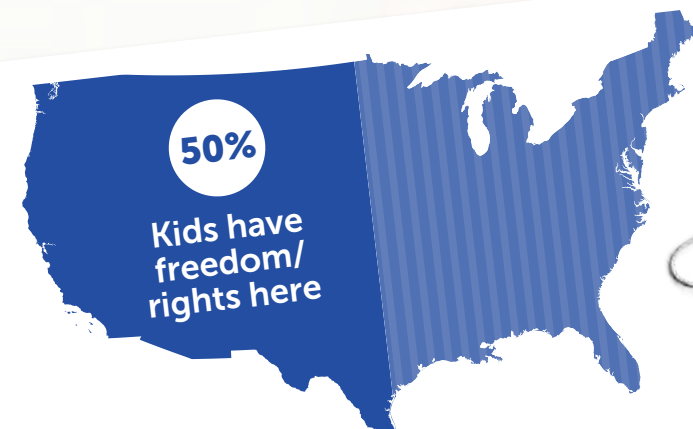
This year, even more kids had that same response—half (50%) cite their **unique freedoms and rights as Americans** as what makes them most proud to live in the United States. Kids also said they **like living here (9%)**, that they **feel safe here (9%)**, and they **get what they need here (8%)**.

"I have the freedom to go to school and become anything I want to be."

— Boy, age 6

"It makes me proud that I live in the United States because we have freedom of speech, and we can use that to say what we think and make the world a better place."

— Girl, age 10



9% Kids like living here



9% Kids feel safe here



8% Kids get what they need here





Special thanks to the kids who sat down to write to Highlights about their lives.

To learn more about Highlights' The State of the Kid 2016 results, watch our videos of kids' responses, or read past reports, please visit [www.highlights.com/sotk](http://www.highlights.com/sotk).

## HIGHLIGHTS™

Devoted to "Fun with a Purpose," Highlights for Children, Inc. ([www.Highlights.com](http://www.Highlights.com)) has helped children become their best selves for more than 70 years. In addition to the flagship magazine, *Highlights*, our company's other offerings include *High Five*™, a magazine for preschoolers; *High Five Bilingüe*™, a dual-language magazine for preschoolers; *Hello*™, a magazine for babies and toddlers; children's book divisions, *Boyd's Mills Press* and *Highlights Press*; and a variety of digital products.

## C+R RESEARCH

C+R Research is a full-service marketing-insights agency that brings more than 30 years of experience in the youth segment, with two syndicated youth lifestyle reports (*YouthBeat* and *YouthBeat Jr.*) and a COPPA-compliant online panel of over 25,000 U.S. kids under the age of 13. Within the youth and family space, C+R specializes in delivering custom quantitative and qualitative research to help youth-targeted companies better understand the needs and motivations of kids and parents.

